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ABSTRACT

Books that remind children and adolescents that writing is fun and that they can be writers not only confirm the reading/writing connection, but also demonstrate that reading can be a springboard to writing. Writing and receiving letters is very exciting to beginning readers, and there are many picture books that provide examples of how to write a letter, what to include, and how a person can organize his/her thoughts. "The Jolly Postman, Or, Other People's Letters" by Janet and Allan Ahlberg, "Frog and Toad Are Friends" by Arnold Lobel, and "Letter to Amy" by Ezra Jack Keats, for example, illustrate some of the purposes of writing with which young children are familiar: to express thanks and appreciation, to issue an invitation, and to express the writer's feelings. Bruce Brooks' "The Moves Make the Man" shows two adolescent boys advocating writing as a worthwhile activity, not something to be confined to school assignments. In this story, the reader is told what "equipment" is needed for writing, and that writing is an effective vehicle for sorting out thoughts, and for telling a story. Other stories such as "Dicey's Song" by Cynthia Voight and "Dear Mr. Henshaw" by Beverly Cleary illustrate that getting a response is another prime reason for writing. And Lois Lowry's "Rabble Starkey" teaches students how to improve their own writing by using a thesaurus. These and other books are good models for reminding students that writing is fun. (PRA)

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WRITING AS LITERATURE

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Beginning Readers and Literary Genre

Young children are most familiar with narrative form. It is easiest to start with narrative literature and introduce stories that include examples of different genres and styles of writing. Writing and receiving letters is very exciting to beginning readers and many picture books provide examples of how to write a letter, what to include, how to organize one's thoughts and one's sheet of stationery. The Jolly Postman, Or, Other People's Letters by Janet and Allan Ahlberg shows examples of the purpose of writing a letter at the same time that it entertains. The letters appear to be written by familiar fairy tale characters and children will easily recognize each character's purpose for writing a letter. It is fun to have children identify the literary characters they recognize and see how the writing style matches the personality of the writer--illustrating that writing should be an expression of the writer's thoughts and reflect the writer's personality. The letter from Goldilocks to the Three Bears is a clear example of a letter of apology; the letter to the Big Bad Wolf makes clear that his behavior towards Red Riding Hood and the Three Little Pigs will not be tolerated any longer.

Frog And Toad Are Friends by Arnold Lobel and Letter To Amy by Ezra Jack Keats also illustrate some of the purposes of writing with which children are familiar: to express thanks and appreciation and to express the writer's feelings. Children recognize this in Frog's

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letter: "Dear Toad, I am glad you are my best friend. Your best friend, Frog." This simple text could be adapted as a model to express thanks or to apologize to a friend. The class can come up with many such examples. The other purpose for writing is to issue an invitation: "Will you please come to my birthday party. Peter. It is this Saturday at 2." Following this example from Letter To Amy children may want to write their own letters, on all sorts of topics.

How does the mail get delivered? Samuel Marshak's Hail To Mail answers this question in graphic detail as one letter travels all over in the postal service's effort to deliver the mail. As long as children are writing, Vicki Cobb's Writing It Down explains the history and development of paper, books, and writing implements. This book makes a fine introduction to very simple research projects and report writing for the primary grades. M.B. Goffstein's A Writer helps children who want to know how someone becomes a writer. She explains that writers are people with ideas and their own visions who take the time to sit and write it down, demystifying the writing process and making it seem a very natural and fun thing to do.

Middle And Older Readers--Reading About Writing

Children need to be reminded that writing is fun, natural, and that they can be writers. In Bruce Brooks' Newbery Award honor book, The Moves Make the Man, we have two fine advocates for writing as a worthwhile activity, not something to be confined to school assignments. Right away, on the very first page of this story framed as a sports story with great appeal for adolescent boys, the reader is told what "equipment" is needed to write, just the way an athlete needs the right

equipment to play the game. Jerome, the main character, immediately provides readers with a purpose for his writing, it is not an assignment, but rather, writing to satisfy a need, a purpose; it is so important for children to understand this. As they read, children see that writing is a pleasant activity, an effective vehicle for sorting out one's thoughts, for telling a story. Many reasons for writing are given: recipes for caring for one's baseball mitt, tips on how to play ball, recording one's feelings, and to remember important conversations. There are two types of writing in The Moves Make the Man, a journal-style notebook with important ideas about playing baseball kept by Bix and Jerome's more personal journal telling his story of his friendship with Bix and the events of one summer. For experienced writers, the book is also a wonderful example of monologue writing.

In Robert Lipsyte's novel, One Fat Summer, character Bobby Marks models the behavior of being a writer. He sees every experience at camp as a potential story, as a potential writing experience. He calls his own experiences preparation for being a writer. This book is helpful in getting students to think as writers and to regard any experiences, their own and ones they observe, as potential material for writing their own stories. Bobby keeps a notebook with him at all times so he can write down anything he experiences or observes because, as he says, "a writer has to get his lines down or he forgets them". He spends his spare money and his earnings on pencils and pads because they are all the materials a writer needs, nothing fancy is needed to become a writer.

Writing is school, as an assignment, is often difficult for children,

especially when they are assigned a topic or a first line. In Dicey's Song by Cynthia Voight, Dicey has written a character sketch of a real person (her mother) as an assigned topic. Her feelings about her mother's illness are intense and writing is very emotional. When the response from her teacher turns out to be an accusation of plagiarism, Dicey's pride and satisfaction in her writing is ruined. Dicey learns, sadly, that an important reason writers write is to get a response from readers as well as to express one's own feelings. Dicey, like many students, has written in order to have her own feelings validated. For us as teachers, it is important to understand that students often reach out through their writing, especially during adolescence. Through Dicey's experience students learn that getting a response is a prime reason for writing and the type of response a writer gets is critical. A negative response is sure to turn most youngsters off from writing.

Leigh Botts, in Beverly Cleary's Dear Mr. Henshaw, also writes to get a response. At the start of the story Leigh is unsure of how to write a letter, what to include, whether or not to ask for a response to his writing, and how to use the correct form of a letter. By the end of the book he is an accomplished, self-confident writer of letters and stories. He has learned, at Mr. Henshaw's suggestion, to keep a diary and write down all his thoughts and experiences and wins a prize for his writing. Letter-writing is also very important in Patricia MacLachlan's Sarah, Plain and Tall, for younger readers. Each letter reflects, very clearly, who it is intended for, whether boy, girl, or adult and shows that questions are responded to in letters, and information is contained in letters. Rabble Starkey in Lois Lowry's book of the same name,

delights in using a thesaurus to improve her own writing efforts. This is a good way to introduce children to one of the ways they can improve their own writing. The story also makes note of the reading/writing connection, that one has to read in order to learn to write: "A book with no pictures lets you make you own pictures in your mind. A guy who writes a book like that really trusts the people who read it to make the kind of pictures he wants them to. Of course he helps them along with the words" (p.133).

All of the books discussed above help to remind children in the most natural way that writing is fun and that they can be writers. Regardless of which book is used as a model, children will see that writing has a purpose and that everyone writes at some time to communicate thoughts, ideas, and emotions. Using any of these books confirms the reading/ writing connection and helps children to see that one flows naturally from the other, that reading can be a springboard to writing.

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